

BioNews – January 2021

Welcome Dr. Mairin Balisi

Dr. Mairin Balisi will be joining the Biology Department in the fall of 2021 as a postdoctoral fellow. During her two-year position at Amherst she will teach several courses and conduct research in vertebrate morphology, paleontology, and paleoecology. A brief bio of Dr. Balisi is pasted below. Keep an eye open for more information in the fall!

From her [website](#):

“I track the evolution of carnivore communities in deep time using evidence from fossils. Currently, I do this as a National Science Foundation Postdoctoral Research Fellow based at La Brea Tar Pits and Museum, Los Angeles, and at the University of California, Merced. In 2018, I finished my doctorate in the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), during which I was also a graduate student in residence in the Department of Vertebrate Paleontology at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County (LACM).



In addition to conducting my doctoral research, at UCLA I taught introductory ecology and behavior, vertebrate morphology, and mathematics for the life sciences. Previously, I earned my master's, also in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. I started out double-majoring in Integrative Biology and Comparative Literature (Japanese and Russian) while scrubbing small carnivoran bones at the University of California, Berkeley.”

Welcome to Environmental Studies professor Becky Hewitt

We have a new neighbor in the Science Center! Prof. Becky Hewitt is a new environmental scientist in the Department of Environmental Studies, and her office and research lab are adjacent to Biology space on the 3rd floor.

Here's a statement about her research interests; you can learn more from her [faculty website](#): “My research focuses on how species traits and interactions shape community structure and ecosystem function. I primarily study how fine-scale belowground processes contribute to broad-scale ecosystem responses to a warming climate and associated changes in disturbance regimes. I focus on investigating the role of plant-fungal interactions in carbon and nitrogen cycling, community assembly after disturbance, and landscape patterns of vegetation change. I explore these research themes primarily in Arctic tundra and boreal ecosystems of Alaska and Siberia.”

In addition to her research, Prof. Hewitt will be teaching courses on climate change, ecosystem ecology, and environmental science. Please join us in welcoming her to Amherst!



Congratulations to Prof. Goldsby

Professor Emeritus Dick Goldsby was recently elected as a [Distinguished Fellow](#) of the American Association of Immunologists. You can view a great interview with Prof. Goldsby, recorded a few years ago, [here](#). Congrats to Prof. Goldsby!

Mammoth Milestone for Shelly Martin

Back before the holidays, Shelly Martin celebrated her 30th anniversary working at Amherst College. For students who don't know, Shelly is our Associate Academic Department Coordinator and she does LOTS of things to support our teaching and research efforts. Thanks for everything you do, Shelly, and congratulations!

Mask scraps become a quilt

As some of you know, Research Laboratory Coordinator Maureen Manning has made hundreds of face masks for Biology faculty, staff and students. She recently made this gorgeous quilt from the fabric scraps. Amazing work, Maureen!



Alumni news

Aleszu Bajak '06 recently joined the staff of *USA Today* as a senior data reporter. You can read more about his work, and what it means to be a data reporter, [here](#).

Julia Newman '13 is beginning a fellowship in palliative care at Beth Deaconess Medical Center in Boston.

Patrick Friend '20 is a co-author on a [recent publication](#) in *Molecular Ecology*, which resulted from his senior thesis research on gill architecture in cichlid fishes.

If you have anything to share for the next BioNews, please send it to Ethan Clotfelter (edclotfelter@amherst.edu)!